

The Grand Riviera Theatre
9222 Grand River Avenue,
Detroit, Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MICH-270

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82-DETRO,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

THE GRAND RIVIERA THEATRE

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82 - DETROIT, 16 -

Location: 9222 Grand River Avenue, at NW corner of its intersection with Riviera Street (formerly Albert Avenue) and Joy Road, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan.

USGS Dearborn Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.245300.4692380

Present Owner: Charles and Virginia R. Kendrick, Detroit, Michigan.

Present Use: Closed for a refurbishment to include a lobby restaurant.

Statement of Significance: The Grand Riviera is a representative example of a large neighborhood moving picture theatre of the mid-1920s. The octagonal corner entrance tower is a distinctive feature of the exterior, and the "atmospheric," or outdoor effect of the auditorium, a popular novelty of the period, is a freely romanticized representation of a Mediterranean garden.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Working drawings are dated November 12, 1924. The theatre was opened to the public on Monday, August 25, 1925. Its seating capacity is 2,773.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The theatre was built by the Grand Riviera Theatre Company on land secured for the purpose from Joseph Esser (November 26, 1924, recorded, Wayne Co. Register of Deeds Feb. 4, 1925, liber 826994) and Charles W. and Anna C. Munz (Nov. 25, 1924, recorded Mar. 12, 1925, liber 835911). The title was then transferred from the Grand Riviera Theatre Co., to James Realty Corporation, James Nederlander, Pres., Frederick Nederlander, Sec'y (on March 2, 1952, Reg. No. D 730652, liber 11642), and then to the National Bank of Detroit (Reg. No. B 565729, liber 12230) and then to Charles and Virginia Kendrick of Detroit in a Land Contract dated Oct. 18, 1972, which was then assigned by the Kendricks to the Small Business Administration, July 15, 1976, for \$141,000, RE: The Riviera Coffee Shop.

3. Architect: John Eberson. Eberson (1875?-1954), an Austrian by birth, came to the United States c. 1908 and began the practice of architecture in St. Louis, moving later to Chicago, and then to New York. He specialized in theatre design and particularly in the "atmospheric" type of theatre décor.

Eberson adapted this technique from the experimental efforts of other architects to create an illusion of sitting in romantic gardens, surrounded by pavilions and pergolas, with stars twinkling and clouds floating overhead. Perfecting this form of theatre design, Eberson made it his own, and all during the 1920s, plans for major atmospheric theatre auditoriums flowed from Eberson's office.

Beginning in 1923 with the Majestic in Houston, Texas, Eberson designed Loew's Valencia in Jamaica and Loew's Paradise in the Bronx, New York; the Avalon, Capitol, and Paradise in Chicago; the Tampa in Tampa and the Olympia in Miami; the Riviera in Omaha and the Capitol in Grand Island, Nebr.; the State in Kalamazoo; the Uptown in Kansas City, Mo.; the Paramount in Nashville and the Majestic in San Antonio; Loew's theatres in Akron, Louisville, and Richmond; the John P. Haines Memorial Theatre in McKeesport, Pa.; and the Grand Riviera and Riviera Annex, Detroit. Eberson's rationale for his specialty is illustrated by his article in the July 12, 1926, issue of Motion Picture News:

We visualize and dream a magnificent amphitheatre up under a glorious moonlit sky in an Italian garden, in a Persian court, in a spanish patio, or in a mystic Egyptian temple-yard, all canopied by soft moonlit sky.

The masses might not know art, but they feel it, and therefore, from ancient classic and definitely established architecture is borrowed shape, form, and order of house, garden, loggia, fountain, or garden wall, to convert the theatre auditorium into a meeting place surrounded by nature's setting.

Color is the most important instrument to create effect and influence the appreciative mind and sensitive soul of the public. We credit the deep azure blue of the Mediterranean sky with a therapeutic value, soothing the nerves and calming perturbing thoughts.

The punch of light and brilliant color of exteriors and lobbies might charm and attract an amusement-loving public, but it is in the softly lighted foyers in the blue-domed auditorium that our mesmerism is performed. Calming the excited feelings and sputtering nerves, the aim is to frame patrons minds and prepare them to receive the entertainment, without the influence of an over-elaborate interior, designed after repeated ornament always in view, persistently claiming the attention. Atmospheric theatre seems to create a very desirable feeling of intimacy and illusion, making an atmosphere which is always new, fresh, and alive.

In an outdoor atmosphere, in addition to the warm, foreign, picturesqueness of some of our conceptions, the spectator enjoys the natural beauties of skies and flowers that it is his nature to love.

He does not feel himself called upon to absorb grandeur and majestic palatial architecture. Thus the atmospheric theatre offers the theatre operator additional material and wares to sell to the public besides his show.

The note on which the essay ends is significant. John Eberson formulated a "practical creed" for theatre architects in the slogan: "Prepare Practical Plans for Pretty Playhouses--Please Patrons--Pay Profits." To judge by the output of the Eberson office, the formula was his key to success.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: A partial set of construction blueprints has been preserved in the collection of Paul P. Bonus, Jr., of Detroit.
5. Alterations and additions: The Grand Riviera has seen little alteration over the years. Of the changes that have been made, the most obvious are in the marquee, whose original classical design was, at a fairly early date, altered to incorporate a lavish swirling pattern of incandescent lights; and in the vertical sign, removing the word GRAND which appeared across the top, and replacing it with THE--thereby shortening the name of the theatre, but emphasizing the main word, RIVIERA. Within the building, the southernmost extension of the mezzanine foyer was enclosed as an office, and the scenery dock walls were removed to accommodate the large traveling stage productions of the 1950s. However, in all essentials, the theatre appears in the 1970s as it did in 1925, save for a sign saying "Closed Indefinitely."

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Grand Riviera was opened on Monday evening, August 24, 1925, with the following dedication:

To the people of Detroit and to their children and to their children's children; that through the years it may lighten the cares of life's vicissitudes with wholesome laughter; that they may drink the innocent inspirations of music; that they may wrap themselves in the soft cloak of the arts and revel in decent recreation against the humdrum routine of mundane existence; that they may find surcease from the responsibilities and the wearing grind of modern metropolitan life--to them and for this does the Grand Riviera Theatre Management dedicate this beautiful temple of play.

The lavishness with which this playhouse has been furnished has occasioned great comment; nevertheless, we feel that the art of modern vaudeville and of the photodrama is worthy of and prospers best in an environment of luxury and refinement. We are convinced that conditions in this exclusive district and in the entire city of Detroit and its suburbs, not only warrant, but demand a vaudeville and photoplay institution of the very first rank.

We have the utmost faith that our judgement will be vindicated by the results--the cooperation and patronage of the residents of Detroit.

On opening night the program featured the orchestra under the direction of Hugo Kalsow; Nina Griffin and George L. Hamrick at the Robert Morton pipe organ; the Chase Boys Choir; and Colleen Moore in the feature picture, "The Desert Flower."

The Grand Riviera continued for several years as a combined motion-picture and vaudeville house, changing to a picture-only policy as sound pictures arrived and vaudeville subsequently declined. From 1957 to 1961 the Grand Riviera was the city's principal legitimate theatre. On its stage appeared many noted entertainers as well as touring companies from several top Broadway musical shows. After the rebuilding of a major downtown legitimate theatre, the Riviera returned to motion pictures, for which both its location and its acoustics were better suited. In time the theatre's finances followed its neighborhood into a decline. More recently, however, there are signs of refurbishment and renewal, and the words on the marquee, "WATCH FOR GALA REOPENING" may not prove too optimistic.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Important old views: A set of 26 photographs taken on or about opening day (August 25, 1925) are in the possession of Drew Eberson, Stamford, Connecticut.

2. Bibliography:

Marquee - Journal of the Theatre Historical Society,
Vol. 5, no. 1, p. 4 (1973) & Vol. 5, no. 3, p. 4
(1973).

Morrison, A. Craig. Opera House, Nickel Show, and
Palace: An Illustrated Inventory of Theatre Build-
ings in the Detroit Area. Dearborn: Greenfield
Village and Henry Ford Museum, 1974.

3. Interviews: Interviews were held with James Conway, Curator of Architectural History, Detroit Historical Museum; Charles Kendrick, owner of the Grand Riviera Theatre; Jack Steiner, Detroit Chamber of Commerce; and Forest E. Youngblood, Tract Index Department, Wayne County Register of Deeds.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: The Grand Riviera Theatre is a representative example of the large neighborhood moving-picture theatre of the mid-1920s and also of the "atmospheric" style of theatre design--a popular novelty of the period.
2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the building is basically good, although cleaning and maintenance have been neglected in recent years.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Layout and shape: Four major elements compose the building mass. A large rectangular auditorium occupies about three-fifths of the site. It is fronted by a smaller and lower rectangular block containing stores and offices. An octagonal corner tower, the tallest element of the complex, houses the lobby. The stage loft at the rear of the auditorium rises to the ridge level of the half-hipped main roof.

2. Overall dimensions: The building is basically rectangular and measures approximately 120 feet by 210 feet overall.
3. Number of stories: The auditorium block and lobby tower are one-story structures of monumental height. The three-story store and office section of the building is actually lower than either of those other major elements.
4. Foundations: Reinforced concrete footings below grade.
5. Wall construction, finish, color: All exterior walls are of light buff-colored brick interspersed with slightly darker buff brick. The tower and office sections are ornamented with cream and cream-on-maroon terra cotta set in face brick. The auditorium and stage walls are built of common brick.

The focal point of the exterior is the octagonal tower at the apex of the southeast and southwest street elevations of the building. It is flanked by two nearly identical minor pavilions parallel to the streets. The store and office block (facing southwest) is set eight inches back from the plane of the pavilion at its side, and the auditorium block (facing southeast) is recessed eight inches between the other pavilion and the stage block. The strong horizontal line of the wide marquee curving across the tower and pavilions creates a visual separation between their ground floor walls and the walls above.

Three bays of the octagonal tower are fully exposed to view; the rest are partially embedded within the building. The exterior ground-floor bays are defined by slender terra-cotta-clad piers now obscured by display panels. The central bay (facing due south) contains the octagonal box office, which bisects the wall plane and is flanked by single doors. Each of the two lateral bays is entirely spanned by two sets of paired doors. The wooden doors have large plate glass panels and are topped by broad glazed transoms masked by grilles of wooden balusters. The transoms are now concealed by modern attraction boards. The box office opens to both the sidewalk and the rotunda within the building. It originally had plate glass windows, each with a transom, set in ornamental metalwork above a marble base and dado. The metalwork angles had spiral colonnettes, and the flat roof was crested. The box office has been altered and now has single plate glass windows set in a thin aluminum framework above a red-bordered white-paneled dado.

Above the marquee, the three exposed bays of the tower are articulated by colossal terra-cotta Renaissance Composite paneled pilasters ornamented by cream bas-relief candelabra on a maroon background. An elaborate terra-cotta entablature, composed of an architrave enriched by bead-and-reel and talon moldings, a frieze of cream-on-maroon rinceaux, and a foliated cymatium cornice, breaks forward slightly over each pilaster "support."

A high brick attic above the entablature, its angles marked by slightly projecting terra-cotta quoins imitating ashlar, terminates in a simple molded sheet-copper entablature now painted black. Each of the six fully exposed attic faces contains a rectangular terra-cotta panel framed by three rows of brick headers. Each panel displays a cream cartouche and pair of gryphon supporters on a maroon ground.

A twenty-five-foot-high arched window is the most conspicuous feature of each visible tower bay. Each window has an ornamental terra-cotta architrave and scrolled keystone and is tripartite below the springing line of the arch. The heavy wooden mullions are intersected by a cross bar at the springing line of the arch and by a minor entablature at a point one third of the total height above the sill. The entablatures originally bore console-supported triangular pediments above their centers. The lower sections of the windows, now partially concealed by the marquee, have eight lights at either side and 12 in the center. The sections above have 12 lights at either side and 18 in the center. The arched portions have concentric sections with radial muntins holding three lights in the inner circle and 12 in the outer one. Above each window, its lower edge tangent to the keystone, is a square cream terra-cotta panel with a crosstetted frame capped and flanked by double scrolls of console shape. The panels are filled by a grille motif of molded balusters against a maroon background.

The pavilions at either side of the octagonal tower are identical except for their ground floors and one small balcony. Both ground-floor sections are sheathed in cream terra cotta simulating ashlar and are terminated by three simply molded bands forming two friezes. The upper frieze continues the line of the original marquee, which it equaled in width. The lower frieze continues below the marquee. The southwest pavilion ground floor contains an arched entrance edged in terra-cotta rope molding within which is a deep-set plain wooden and glass single-paneled door below an arched transom. This entrance leads

to the first-floor theatre manager's office and the second and third-floor rental offices. To the east of the entrance are a theatre display panel with a rectangular window screened by wooden balusters above it. The pavilion facing southeast has no openings. Instead, it has a tall display panel flanked by two lower ones with ornamental terra-cotta panels above them.

Above the marquee, each pavilion has a French window elaborately framed in a terra-cotta architrave capped by a console-supported triangular broken pediment with a fluted semi-urn on a festooned pedestal at its center. The frieze between the consoles has cream rinceaux on a maroon ground. Each leaf of the paired wooden French window-doors has 12 lights. The southwest pavilion opening is fronted by a small wrought-iron-railed balcony with three steps leading to the marquee roof. At the third-story level, the pavilion walls have no openings. Instead, each is ornamented by an elliptical terra-cotta cartouche bearing a crowned shield with three Florentine lilies. Each pavilion has a terra-cotta entablature with a cream-on-maroon rinceau frieze and an enriched cornice supporting a cream terra-cotta cresting of foliated finial forms on console-flanked pedestals.

The three-bay-wide and three-stories-high facade of the store and office block adjoins the southwest pavilion to complete the front (Grand River Avenue) elevation of the building. The first story has three standard metal and glass store fronts set between terra-cotta imitation ashlar piers and below a terra-cotta entablature motif with a belt course "cornice" and a frieze that continues the horizontal line of the original marquee. Each store is spanned by a high glass transom and has a single recessed door. The facade of the upper two floors is treated as a colossal shallow triple arcade motif. There is an oval terra-cotta plaque above each of the two middle piers, and the main entablature and roof cresting are identical to those of the pavilions. Terra-cotta impost blocks mark the springing point of the arches. The windows are paired and are grouped to form an arcuated motif set shallowly within the larger arches. The second-floor windows have double-hung one-over-one-light wooden sash, and those on the third floor are similar, except for having arch-headed upper lights. The spandrels between the stories have large slightly projecting brick panels laid in running bond, and the tympana above the third-story windows are set in all-header bond.

Beyond the southeast pavilion, the taller walls of the auditorium and stage form the major portion of the Riviera Street elevation. The expansive plane of common brick auditorium wall is relieved above a belt course by nine vertical "panels," their borders formed by three rows of headers. The even loftier stage wall has three similar but taller "panels," the two flanking the central one being narrower than the rest. The group of three paired exits nearest the front has an architrave of brick set edgewise. The other openings (a single set of paired doors, a group of two paired doors, a single stage door under a three-light transom, and a pair of taller stage doors, all at street level; and four pairs of fire-escape doors and a small metal-sashed six-over-six-light window) have no formal treatment whatever. The auditorium and stage walls are capped by simple molded sheet-copper copings. The rear (northeast) and northwest walls are entirely without ornament and are capped by copings of vitreous tile. All exit doors are metal-sheathed. Northeast and northwest windows have wire glass set in double-hung metal sash.

6. Roof, shape and covering: The corner tower has a red tile octagonal hipped roof with a tall metal baluster-shaped finial. The office block and pavilion roofs are flat and are surfaced with built-up composition material. The half-hipped auditorium roof, its approximately 14° slope almost concealed behind a low brick parapet, is also covered with composition roofing. The flat composition stage roof has a large hipped metal ventilator at its center.
7. Fire escapes: The southeast elevation bears a metal fire escape running diagonally from an upper balcony exit (with additional exits at the middle and front cross aisles) to the second-floor level, where it re-enters the building via an interior concrete fire stair to emerge at street level. The fire escape railing is simply patterned. On the northwest wall, three pipe-railed fire escapes provide egress to an alley from the dressing rooms, theatre balcony, and offices, respectively. The dressing room fire escape rises to the stage roof and gives egress from the fly gallery and gridiron within. The dressing room and balcony fire escapes are sited at ten-foot offsets of the northwest wall.
8. Marquee and sign: The marquee forms a quarter circle, following the lines of the corner tower, and extends tangentially across the flanking pavilions. At the center of the curve is a large white-glass illuminated attraction board. The remainder of the marquee is

faced with sheet-metal, painted, and studded with light bulbs in irregular swirls centering on circles containing an "R" monogram. This facing conceals a much more restrained and elegant original.

The original facing had three double-ranked low horizontal illuminated attraction boards surmounted by minor cresting with a palmette antefix. The glyph-ornamented marquee fascia was concave in plan between the display panels, and straight at each end. Its cresting pattern resembled Greek acroteria.

The tall original vertical sign, approximately 53 feet high by 12 feet wide, projects at a right angle from the center of the southwest pavilion wall. It has a steel skeleton clad in sheet metal. Within the widened topmost section, which is capped by a broken pediment, the original word GRAND has been replaced by T H E in large block letters. The long vertical section contains the word RIVIERA in much larger letters of similar style. The letters were originally illuminated by incandescent bulbs, later by neon tubing, but the lighting has been inoperative for many years. The present color of the sign is medium green with letters in Day-Glo orange. An earlier color scheme was white lettering on a dark blue ground.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Rotunda lobby: This lobby occupies the southeastern corner of the building. It is entered directly from the sidewalk with no intermediate vestibules. It is circular in plan, approximately 40 feet in diameter, and is divided into eight bays corresponding to the eight sides of the octagonal exterior.
 - a. Floor: The rotunda floor is laid in multi-colored, ceramic tile. A wide ornamental band circles the room, and there is a circular center panel. The field of the floor is divided into eight panels by ornamental tile bands radiating from the center to the mid-points of the eight bays.
 - b. Walls: The eight bays of the rotunda walls are identical in architectural treatment above the first-story level, varying below the first cornice according as their functions differ. At the lower level rectangular pilasters, finished in heavy textured plaster and painted a dull antique gold, define the bays. The pilasters are topped by thin capitals with plain

abacus, enriched ovolo and foliated cymatium. The southeast, south, and southwest bays contain the entrance doors and the box office, as described above.

The first floor level of the east bay, immediately to the right of the entrance bays, is open except for plain short wall segments at either side. From a triangular landing within the bay, three wide white marble steps cascade beyond the wall plane, and a broad, straight run rises at a 45° angle to the mezzanine level. The first-floor level of the north and northeast bays is wholly open except for the square central pier dividing them. Within the bays an irregularly shaped sub-space, whose walls are plain except for display panels and radiator grille at the northwest end, leads from the rotunda to the four pairs of glazed wooden northeast doors giving access to the auditorium foyer.

The almost identical west and northwest bays, to the left of the three entrance bays, are the only walled first-floor portions of the rotunda lobby. Each bay is subdivided into three minor bays and three horizontal zones. The center section of the west bay is occupied by a single-paneled wooden door (to the theatre manager's office) inset below a wooden-paneled "transom." The lower zone of the west bay (interrupted by the central door) is a dado of two rectangular textured plaster panels framed by a ceramic tile base, small vertical wooden panels (doubled at the door), and a chair rail. The middle zone contains two almost square glass-doored display panels flanked by small modified Renaissance Corinthian pilasters with panels elaborately ornamented by bas-relief pendants of musical instruments, tragic and comic masks, and floral motifs. These pilasters are doubled beside the office door. The upper zone, a frieze above a miniature wooden entablature motif, contains ornamental plaster ventilating grilles of arabesque pattern above the display panels and, above the door, a painted plaster tympanum with bas-relief foliated spandrel panels joined to the cornice above by a foliated cymatium. The central section of the northwest bay is occupied by a grille-fronted dado above which is a semi-circular shell-headed niche with a marble sill. (The shell occupies a space corresponding to the painted tympanum above the office door of the west bay.) Otherwise, except for the ornamental metal grilles (masking radiators) in the panels flanking the dado below the niche, the treatment of the two bays is identical.

Above the first story the rotunda lobby is encircled by an entablature whose cornice is supported by heavy ornamental brackets which extend the full depth of the frieze, dividing it into a series of rectangular panels, each ornamented with a rinceau. The cornice cymatium is richly ornamented. Above the cornice is a blind plaster balustrade, with enriched balusters. This is broken by a paneled pedestal above each of the first-story pilasters. In the center of each bay, an elaborately ornamented urn rests on the balustrade railing.

At this "piano nobile" level, the eight rotunda bays are defined by colossal pilasters that continue the vertical axes of the piers below. Each pilaster rests on a base with ornamented torae, the lower ones being foliated, the upper ones spirally banded, and each panel shaft is ornamented by an elaborate bas-relief candelabrum. The modified Renaissance Corinthian capitals have narrow ornamented necks, central open palmette motifs flanked by acanthus-based volutes, and egg-and-dart abaci with fleurons. A full Corinthian entablature supported by the pilasters is lavishly enriched with a rinceau frieze and modillion cornice with rosettes in its soffit. The entablature is curved to follow the wall but breaks forward in a straight segment over each pilaster.

Each bay of the rotunda wall contains a large, round-headed window, similar to the exterior windows except for the omission of the central pediment from the transom bar. The three windows that penetrate to the outside are glazed with clear glass, the five blind windows with mirrors which for years have been painted over in dull gold with ornamental stencilling in alternating panes.

- c. Ceiling: The rotunda ceiling is a highly enriched hemispherical dome. It has a centerpiece of concentric moldings of varying pattern, from which radiates a series of ribs dividing the upper half of the ceiling into 24 segments. The ribs are enriched with floral ornament, and each terminates in a molded human head. The heads are connected with each other by fruit garlands. The panels between the ribs are ornamented by arabesques sprouting from vases supported by pairs of winged maidens.

Below the ribbed area, the lower zone of the dome is coffered, having two rows of egg-and-dart-bordered

sunken panels entwined by bas-relief foliated arabesques which emanate from vases just above the cornice. Small gilded putti mark the intersections of the vertical and horizontal tendrils between the coffers. The coffers themselves bear a cycle of six different figural reliefs symbolizing music, drama, and the dance.

- d. Lighting: A large metal and glass chandelier hangs from the center of the rotunda dome. Below a metal disk, eight long chains suspend a bowl-shaped basket of glass beading from whose metal rim rise eight foliated ribs supporting a circle of unshaded light bulbs with a periphery of 16 tapered square lanterns and, above them, a large ornamental ring of crested metal. Each first-floor pilaster bears a wrought-iron filigree cruciform bracket with three square openwork light baskets set with colored glass "jewels." The central railing of the marble stairway has single-light standards of similar design on its elaborate cast-iron newel posts.
2. Foyer - Orchestra and Mezzanine levels: The four paired doors beyond the north and northeast rotunda bays lead to the foyer, a slightly curved space (its radius projected from the midpoint of the stage floor) 18 feet wide and approximately 105 feet long that extends entirely across the rear of the orchestra level. An open pier-supported seven-bay arcade only partially blocked by glass-topped standee's parapets divides the first-floor foyer from the auditorium, and a balustraded well at the three central bays opens the foyer vertically through the mezzanine level. The two end bays are slightly longer than the other five and accommodate stairways. The northwest stairway ascends in two runs, turning 45° at a landing, and has a small rectangular well. The upper portion of the marble stairway rising from the rotunda cuts partially across the southeast bay. There is a doorman's closet beneath this stairway and a janitor's closet beside the lower run of the northwest stairway.

At the mezzanine level, the open well filling the three central bays separates two lounge areas connected by a slightly curving passage that is open on the foyer side between six piers. The southwest lounge area occupies two foyer bays (except for the space taken by the southeast stairs) and originally also occupied a triangular area, between the foyer and the rotunda wall, that is now partitioned off for an office. The other, smaller,

lounge area occupies the rectangular bay between the end of the central well and the northwest stairs. The connecting barrel-vaulted passage runs above the rear rows of the auditorium orchestra seating below. It gives access to vomitoria from each end and the center of the balcony cross aisle. Between the vomitoria are (from left to right) the boy ushers' room entered both from the passage and the men's room; the men's room entered from the smoking room; the smoking room entered from the passage; the girl ushers' room partly under the central vomitorium and entered from the ladies' parlor; the ladies' parlor entered from the passage; and the ladies' room entered from the ladies' parlor. The southeast stairs rise from the mezzanine to the rear of the balcony in two runs, turning 45° at a landing, and the northwest stairs ascend to the balcony rear in two runs in opposite directions with a landing between them. A small triangular storage room is entered by a door under the southeast stairs and has French doors to a small exterior balcony leading to the roof of the entrance marquee. The door to a wedge-shaped closet is in the southwest (and only) wall of the smaller lounge area.

- a. Wall treatment and decoration: The foyer and mezzanine passage walls are surfaced with heavily textured plaster, originally painted antique gold. (The short southeast wall is spanned by three sets of paired exit doors.) The rear first-floor wall is articulated by five heavy square engaged piers supporting wide segmental arches, forming a blind arcade at the second through the fifth bays from the southeast end. (The other bays are occupied by stairs.) The opposite arcade, open to the auditorium, extends the full length of the foyer and has eight freestanding piers. All piers have plain wooden-paneled casings with rebated corners, and Renaissance Composite capitals. The rear wall arches have guilloche-ornamented soffits; the others each have two sets of anthemion-flanked paterae. All arch faces have talon moldings; the wedge-shaped spandrels have small floriated panels. A strongly projecting elaborately enriched modillion cornice that breaks forward above heavy ornamental corbels at each intermediate pier surrounds the three-bayed central well.

At the mezzanine level, the well is surrounded by a compound-ornamented wooden balustrade similar to the plaster balustrade in the rotunda. Paneled pedestals aligned with the piers support the railing and were originally surmounted by large ornamental lidded urns, now missing.

The five central bays of the mezzanine foyer are demarked by six large wooden-paneled piers at each side. All are freestanding except four engaged piers demarking the fourth, fifth, and sixth bays (counting from the southeast end) of the rear wall. All continue the vertical axes of the first-floor piers. The tops of the piers have no capitals but are flanked by large ornamental consoles supporting beams faced by an entablature motif with a rinceau frieze. The "entablatures" continue, with slight forward breaks, above each pier. The plaster of the southwest wall is now painted deep blue and ornamented with painted stars. The southeast lounge walls originally had large paneled mirrors. (The alteration of this area to provide an extra office matches the original construction.) The mezzanine passage, or promenade, has pilaster responds to the piers and a repetition of the entablature motif with rinceau frieze. The smoking room off the passage has a tile floor and very high tile dado; the ladies' parlor off the passage has a carpeted floor and walls with fabric-covered rectangular panels.

- b. Ceiling: The ceiling of the central five bays of the mezzanine foyer is a series of unornamented plaster groined vaults. The mezzanine passage flanking the foyer has a segmental barrel vault with a candelabrum-ornamented archivolt at each pier line. There is a plaster grille at the center of each vault segment.
 - c. Lighting and metalwork: The lighting fixtures are similar to those in the rotunda -- wrought-iron brackets mounted on the piers. Those at the lower level have triple candle fixtures, whereas the mezzanine fixtures have single metal light baskets. These are supplemented by similar basket-like "lanterns" hanging from the grilles of the mezzanine passage ceiling. Other notable metalwork includes the ornamental stair railings, and the wrought-iron gates (now stored elsewhere) that originally hung in the arched entries to the smoking room and the ladies' parlor.
3. Auditorium: The auditorium is designed to give the effect of an Italian garden. Hence, the walls are treated as exterior building elements, while the blue-painted ceiling, representing the dome of the sky, is unornamented save for controlled lighting effects. Decorative treatment aside, the auditorium is a simple rectangle (except for the slightly curved rear wall) measuring 107 feet

wide by 132 feet deep overall. The side walls are actually parallel but appear to be canted inward where the front of the auditorium is reduced in width by the insertion of triangular elements representing "buildings." The ceiling extends behind those elements to the full rectangular shape of the room. The proscenium opening is 31 feet high by 54 feet, nine inches wide. There is a wide, depressed fixed-floor orchestra pit in front of the stage. The auditorium floor has five aisles and rises gently, the rows of seats being stepped slightly up, from front to rear. The rows curve, but each is laterally level. The single balcony projects deeply into the auditorium and rises at a fairly steep pitch, continuing above the foyer ceiling. It has five stepped aisles and two cross aisles, the lower one slightly forward of mid-depth reached by three vomitoria from the mezzanine passage. The rear balcony corners are reached by stairways at either end of the foyer. The balcony is supported by a large steel truss spanning two heavy round columns at about mid-depth of the outer aisles of the orchestra floor.

- a. Decorative treatment: The proscenium opening, a broad five-centered arch, rests upon pedestals and is framed by engaged modified Renaissance Corinthian piers supporting the bracketed eaves of a simulated tile roof of almost 60° pitch. The piers have two exposed faces, rest on vase-and-arabesque-ornamented paneled pedestals, and have paneled candelabrum-ornamented shafts. Their capitals are composed of draped winged female figures (possibly representing tutelaries) flanked by acanthus leaves. The eaves project over the orchestra pit on a series of thin, elongated brackets between which are conventionalized foliate panels above an egg-and-dart molding. Similar foliation in the soffit panels enframes round openings for colored lights illuminating the orchestra pit below. An enriched plaster balustrade, between four wreath-ornamented pedestals and a central niche sheltering the statue of a shepherd boy, crowns the "tile roof." The pedestals originally supported leaded glass urn-shaped luminaria. The niche is flanked by Corinthian pilasters and has a scrolled pediment with a central finial. This heavy framing motif encloses the arch itself, which has a concave rinceau-ornamented face bordered by a bound floral molding (top) and an enriched cable molding (bottom), and two spandrels, each containing a richly framed bas-relief gryphon. The rinceau soffit of the proscenium arch is supported by pilasters that face each

other across the opening. They rest on pedestals and have attic bases with enriched torae; low, modified Corinthian capitals; and candelabrum-ornamented paneled shafts. The pedestals below the coved facing of the proscenium arch adjoin the pedestals supporting the inner pilasters and those supporting the outer piers at a 45° angle. These intermediate pedestals, originally displaying mechanical annunciators giving the names of the vaudeville acts on stage, are headed by voluted "pediments" formed by extensions of the cymatium capping the entablature motifs of the flanking pedestals.

An asymmetrical garden setting is created by the varied arrangement of the "building" pavilions that occupy the front corners of the auditorium. The major differentiation is limited to their second-story level and is determined primarily by a functional factor, the placement of the organ chamber within the southeast wall pavilion, whereas the northwest wall is designed to represent a balustraded garden terrace with a belvedere of tholos form.

The facade of the one-storied northwest wall pavilion (on the left, as one faces the stage) is composed of three bays crowned by a balustraded entablature. The walls have alternating wide and narrow ashlar courses simulated in plaster, and the distyle in antis central bay opens to an "ashlar-walled" alcove sheltering a simple wrought-iron-railed exit stair. The two columns at the opening have shafts with spirally banded lower halves and upper halves ornamented with bas-relief candelabra. Their modified Renaissance Corinthian capitals have winged female busts instead of the usual volutes. Each of the flanking bays has a niche containing a cast of a classical female statue, Hebe at the left and a bacchante at the right, toward the stage. The niches, flanked by plain pilasters, have console-flanked, three-paneled bases with vase and arabesque ornament. They are headed by shell-ribbed half-domes that spring from single rows of small square coffers. The entablature is recessed slightly above the central bay and is composed of a thin architrave with enriched talon molding, a frieze of anthemias and (centered over each bay) paired cornucopias, and a cornice with enriched olovo molding and cymatium. The balustrade surmounting the entablature has four arabesque-paneled pedestals that originally supported festooned and lidded urn-shaped metal and glass luminari (at each end) and casts of an Amazon (left) and Aphrodite (right), all now missing.

The major element within the "garden terrace" behind the balustrade is the belvedere, or tempietto, of tholos form. This hexastyle structure measures approximately $12\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter by 24 feet to the top of the finial of its dome. The column shafts are lavishly ornamented, having strapwork lower thirds and reticulate-patterned upper portions. Their modified Composite capitals have inverted helices. The annular entablature has a richly foliated frieze bordered by enriched talon and ovolo moldings, and an enriched cymatium. The entablature supports a very low parapet with an enriched talon molding. Six luminaria like those formerly on the terrace balustrade stand atop the parapet in line with the columns below. The hemispherical dome springing from the parapet has a roof of imitation tiles and terminates in a large finial shaped like a concave-sided and glyph-patterned lidded jar. The inside of the entablature repeats its exterior form, except that the frieze is paneled. The ceiling of the dome has ornamented coffers.

The first floor of the two-storied pavilion at the right (as one faces the stage) is almost identical to the northwest wall pavilion described above. It differs primarily in that the central bay is spanned by a console-supported wide segmental arch faced with an enriched talon molding. The archway and its wedge-shaped arabesque-ornamented spandrels support a minor entablature with foliated brackets separating ornamented panels. The archway opens into an "ashlar-walled" alcove containing the foot of an exit stairway and a niche like those described above. The niche originally contained a cast of the Artemis of Gabii, later removed to the right-hand side bay niche. Each side bay niche originally held an elaborate two-handled urn, that on the left a copy of one known as the Medici vase.

The second floor of the pavilion (the organ chamber) is designed as a three-bayed Mannerist casino articulated by pedestal-based candelabrum-paneled Corinthianesque pilasters supporting a rich balustraded entablature with a rinceau frieze. The pilaster pedestals have phoenix-ornamented panels. The entablature breaks forward slightly above each pilaster. The central bay is treated as a triple-arched loggia screened by a plaster grille to conceal the organ pipes within. The lower half of the grille is now missing. This distyle in antis loggia has spiral

columns with foliate banding. The columns and the candelabrum-paneled antae have ornamented pedestals between which are parapets capped by shell-based corbeled shelves that originally supported a statue of a shepherd boy (center) and two rectangular planter boxes. In the spandrels above the arches there are two circular ornamental plaques. Each of the bays flanking the loggia contains a tabernacle-framed casement "window" above a parapet ornamented with bas-relief foliate arabesques flanking a pair of draped dancing female figures and a central mask. The "windows" have 14 "lights" in each unglazed casement and are draped and illuminated from within. Each is framed by candelabrum-paneled Corinthianesque pilasters supporting a richly ornamented broken triangular pediment. The balustrade crowning the pavilion and concealing the flat roof deck is supported by four ornamented pedestals aligned with the pilasters below, and a central three-paneled podium topped by a large cartouche. The pedestals flanking the central podium support casts of Diana the Huntress (left) and the Mattei Amazon (right). The extreme right pedestal formerly supported an illuminated urn like those described above. The balcony parapet joins the pedestal of the pilaster at the right-hand corner of the pavilion with a convex quarter circle and then swings across the auditorium in a broad concave curve to join the balustrade of the opposite (northwest) pavilion in another small convex quarter circle. The balcony parapet precisely equals the northwest pavilion balustrade in height and is ornamented throughout by bas-relief arabesque panels.

Beyond the pavilions, the pseudo ashlar in alternating wide and narrow courses is continued as "garden walls" with "sky" above them on both sides of the auditorium at both orchestra and balcony levels. With the minor variation of southeast exits in place of certain northwest wall niches, both walls (beyond the pavilions) are identical at both levels. Below the balcony, the walls stop four feet short of the soffit to allow for "sky." The northwest wall contains three niches, the large central one shell-headed above two rows of coffers and framed by pilasters and an entablature, the smaller two niches edged by rope molding and surmounted by armorial Baroque pediments. The central niche shelters a cast of what appears to be a seated Venus; the other niches contain lidded two-handled urns on plinths. There are plaster panels representing a procession of robed figures (possibly based on part

of the Panathenaic frieze of the Parthenon) flanking the niche nearest the pavilion. In the southeast wall, paired metal exit doors are substituted for the central niche, but the framing elements are repeated.

The balcony soffit is divided laterally by a beam casing concealing the lower portion of the main structural support truss. Below the balcony front is a row of 19 square coffers with an irregularly shaped coffer at each end. The coffers are richly framed, and each contains a single light bulb. The original bulbs were enmeshed in glass beading. The forward area of the soffit is divided into seven large panels of equal width. Each has an enriched bas-relief cove composed of a central patera flanked by a pair of Greek sphinxes and foliate arabesques. The front run of each cove is a plaster grille. A recessed round leaded glass light is centered in each panel. Behind the beam, the ceiling is a simple flat panel with a coved grille at its forward edge and a series of relatively small metal chandeliers.

At the balcony level, the "garden wall" effect rises in steps toward the rear of the auditorium to maintain an approximately uniform height above the steeply rising rows of seats. The northwest "garden wall" begins at the proscenium, passes behind the tempietto, and continues to the rear. The southeast "garden wall" begins at the junction of the balcony with the pavilion. From that point to the rear of the auditorium, both walls are identical, except that three exits in the southeast wall replace the three principal niches of the northwest wall.

The northwest "garden wall" has a variety of ornamental elements at the rear of the balustraded "terrace" containing the tempietto. Next to the proscenium is a shell-headed niche in a tall "wall" capped by an armorial Baroque pediment. At the left of the niche there is a buttress. The "wall" continues as a lower, balustraded element, interrupted by a buttress, to an exit flanked by buttresses. All these buttresses are console-headed and support urn-shaped luminaria like those described above. The exit is headed by a circular niche containing a bust of the Praxitelean Hermes and is capped by a garlanded Baroque broken pediment. Beyond the exit, a balustraded segmental arch with foliated spandrels brings the wall motif to the balcony plane.

The first rise in the "wall" height is effected by a pilaster-flanked niche, its arch filled by a plaster grille, capped by an armorial Baroque broken pediment with an illuminated urn-shaped finial. (The matching enframingent on the opposite (southeast) wall contains paired metal exit doors.) The niche contains a torchère. There is a small circular plaque to the left of the niche. The next rise carries the "wall" up about eight feet and is buttressed by a console. An illuminated urn caps the corner. This "wall" section contains a plaster-grilled "window" with a Baroque architrave, above which are two plaster "flower boxes" and a small cresting element composed of two console scrolls supporting a finial. The next rise, a slight one, is effected by a niche enframingent similar to the previous one, except that the Baroque broken pediment is triangular and is garlanded instead of having a beribboned armorial cartouche. The niche contains a cast of what appears to be Pallas Athena. There is a small circular plaque to the left of this niche also. (In the opposite wall, exit doors correspond to the niche.) Beyond this point, the "wall" is interrupted by a rectangular projection extending about six feet into the balcony (to provide space for a vomitorium), and the wall motif rises about another six feet. This segment has a rinceau frieze, and a cornice bearing three luminaria. It contains a comparatively small (six-foot-high) rope-molding-edged niche within which is a lidded two-handled urn on a plinth. The rest of the wall motif rises about 12 feet to the ceiling. It contains a niche framed by a rectangular architrave with a cresting composed of a plinth-based urn supported by console motifs. The niche contains a torchère and is flanked by two comparatively small rectangular bas-relief figural panels. (Opposite, an exit in the southeast wall replaces the niche.) The effect of alternating wide and narrow ashlar courses is continued across the rear wall of the balcony.

To complete the effect of a "garden," the auditorium was originally decorated with great quantities of artificial plants and flowers. The "planter boxes" were filled, the balustrades were entwined with flowering vines, and the tempietto was thickly banked with shrubs. The tops of the "garden walls" held tall imitation cypresses, and the trellised ceiling above the rear half of the balcony was bedecked with trailing vines and strings of lighted paper lanterns. White artificial doves perched on balustrades and cornices

throughout the auditorium, and a stuffed parrot, architect Eberson's "trademark," perched on a ring hanging in the exit bay below the "terrace." These decorations have long been missing from the theatre's now more restrained interior.

- b. Decorative ceiling treatment: The auditorium ceiling, a low elliptical semi-dome extending back to approximately the mid-point of the balcony, is a suspended vault of smooth unornamented plaster. It curves downward to the sides and front of the auditorium and extends beyond the silhouetted tops of the "garden walls," from whence it is lighted from hidden coves. The entire ceiling is painted deep blue to resemble a night sky. The open air effect changes to a semi-enclosed effect at about mid-point above the balcony. This rear fifth of the ceiling is designed to represent a vast pergola with a grid of plaster beams imitating trellis work through which deep blue sky is glimpsed. A nine-foot-wide elliptical arch spans the auditorium at the point where the protrusions containing the side vomitoria of the balcony occur and divides the open "sky" from the "pergola." The arch is ornamented by three rows of square coffers, the center ones being four times the size of the others and enriched by alternating circular moldings and octagonal air grilles.
- c. Lighting and special effects: Lighting in the auditorium was designed to heighten the outdoor effect of the architectural treatment. Low-level lighting was provided by the many illuminated glass urns atop balustrades and "garden walls" throughout the auditorium as well as by lights in the ends of the seating rows and in several of the statuary niches. General lighting effects were achieved by concealed blue floodlights set approximately 18 inches apart around the perimeter of the "sky" dome in a cove at its base. The naturalism of the darkened "sky" was enhanced by electric "stars" set in constellation formations. These sparkling "stars" were composed of small lights in sheet metal cones behind very small apertures drilled in the plaster ceiling. They were individually controlled by intermittent dimmers, creating a continuous twinkling effect. A motorized device near the tempietto projected moving cloud images across the ceiling, and the striking realism was further enhanced by a similar nearby projector casting the image of a circling airplane. A battery of orange

floodlights simulated sunrise and sunset effects. Except for the "stars," these special effects have been removed from the theatre.

d. Pipe organ: The Grand Riviera Theatre originally contained a 17-rank Robert Morton pipe organ, controlled by a three-manual console at the left end of the orchestra pit. The pipes were in two adjacent chambers within the southeast pavilion beside the proscenium and spoke through the grilled loggia arcade and the unglazed casement "windows." More recently, the organ has been removed from the theatre.

e. Seating: The seating follows a standard theatre seating design of its period (1925). Cast-iron frames support spring-loaded tilting seats and wooden backs. Each chair back has a gracefully curved top and a central recessed cushion in green upholstery. The row ends are special castings bearing "GR" monograms. There are 1,664 seats in the orchestra and 1,109 in the balcony, making a total seating capacity of 2,773.

4. Stage and backstage area: The working area of the stage is about 30 by 80 feet. The gridiron is 65 feet above the stage floor. The floor itself is maple and has two trapdoors, a large one at center stage and a smaller one in the wings beyond stage left. Southeast of the stage there was originally a scene dock through which scenery was lowered by a skidway to backstage from a street-level delivery door four and a half feet above. During the 1950s the scene dock was removed to increase the working area of the stage. The lighting control board and the counterweight rail are just beyond stage right. Beyond them, northwest of the stage, are three tiers of rooms comprising eleven dressing rooms and a stage hands' locker room. Beneath the stage are the electric control room, fan room, refrigeration room, organ blower room, chorus dressing room, and the musicians' room (which connects with the orchestra pit).

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The Grand Riviera Theatre is freestanding on the north corner of the intersection of Grand River Avenue with Riviera Street opposite Joy Road, which jogs toward the southeast where it intersects with Grand River Avenue. The front (Grand River Avenue) elevation faces southwest, the central (box office) bay of the entrance faces almost due south, and the Riviera

Street flank of the theatre faces southeast. The other (northwest) flank and the rear (northeast) elevation face alleys. Riviera Street, called Albert Avenue when the theatre was built, was later renamed. The surrounding buildings are neighborhood commercial structures of relatively modest scale.

2. Sidewalk: Standard concrete city sidewalks border the theatre.

Prepared by Andrew Craig Morrison
Architect
National Park Service
1970

Lucy Pope Wheeler
Writer/Editor, HABS
1976

and

Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian, HABS
1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Grand Riviera Theatre documentation was prepared as part of a Historic American Buildings Survey project to record selected representative examples of theatre design in the United States during the first third of the 20th century. This project, begun under James C. Massey, former HABS Chief, was carried out under the general supervision of Dr. John Poppeliers, succeeding Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey since 1972. Measured drawings were prepared by HABS Architect A. Craig Morrison in 1970, and the title page and final editing of the drawings were done by Clayton Fraser, HABS architect, 1974. Photographs from 1970 are by Allen Stross, of Ann Arbor, Michigan. The historic photographs are archival copies made by HABS Photographer Jack E. Boucher, from a 1925 photographic collection of John Eberson, Manhattan architect of the Grand Riviera, and lent to the Survey in 1969-1970 by his son, Drew Eberson. A small amount of additional data from 1976 is included. Addenda were written and final editing was done in the HABS office in 1978.